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The Impact of Seven Dimensions of Emotional Maltreatment on Self Concept of School Adolescents in Ota, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper investigates the effect of seven dimensions of emotional maltreatment on self-concept of school adolescents. Two hundred adolescents selected through purposive sampling technique from fifteen private secondary schools in Ota, Nigeria participated in the study. Questionnaire on Seven Dimensions Emotional Maltreatment at Home (QSDEMH) and Adolescent Personal Data Inventory (APDI) are used to generate data. Three research hypotheses are tested at 0.05 alpha level using multiple regression and correlation coefficient. The findings indicate that the seven independent variables jointly account for 28.0% of the variance in self concept ($R^2 = .280$.) The independent variables contribute differently to the prediction of self concept and negative significant relationship exists between the predictors and self concept. It is recommended that Psychologists and Counsellors commence the development of therapeutic strategies that will address the seven dimensions of emotional maltreatment.

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Introduction

Emotional abuse/maltreatment is a problem that is affecting people all races, religions, socio-economic groups, sex, and ages (Lueders, 2002; Jolly, Aluede, & Ojugo, 2009). Although emotional abuse is difficult to define (Lueders, 2002), the American Humane Association (2010) defines it as a pattern of behavior by parents or caregivers that can seriously interfere with a child's cognitive, emotional, psychological or social development. This clearly points to the fact that parents have the tendency to inflict emotional abuse on their children. The emotional maltreatment meted out to adolescents at home comes in different forms and diverse circumstances. Although there is lack of consensus on which classification is supreme, the following classification documented in literature include rejecting, degrading, terrorizing, isolating, corrupting/exploiting, denying (Stevens, 2006); rejecting, isolating, ignoring, corrupting, exploiting, terrorizing (Barriere, 2009); ignoring, rejecting, isolating, exploiting/corrupting, verbally assaulting, terrorizing, neglecting the child (American Humane Association, 2010); degrading, exploiting, corrupting, isolating, ignoring, rejecting, and terrorizing (Gesinde, 2010).

Accurate statistics on the prevalence of adolescents who suffered emotional maltreatment are rather difficult to come across probably because it is underreported or difficult to detect. Notwithstanding, there are data

substantiating the existence of diverse forms of abuse in different countries of the world. For instance, in Pennsylvania over 23,000 cases of suspected abuse are recorded out of which 5,000 reports are substantiated (McLey, 2003). In Southern Sri Lanka, Perera, Qstbye, Ariyananda, & Lelwala (2009) report that out of a sample of 1099 male and 1290 female late adolescents, 31.3% of males, and 25.4% of females reported haven been subjected to emotional abuse at least a few times in the 3 months preceding the survey. In Okene town in Kogi State of Nigeria, Daniel (2004) finds that emotional abuse tops the list of other abuses. These data on the prevalence of emotional abuse notwithstanding, Beswick (2009) opined that emotional abuse is more common than what people previously thought because it is a type of abuse consistently used by abusers due to the ease associated with hiding the abuse.

The short and long term effects of different dimensions of emotional maltreatment in diverse aspects of human development have received considerable attention of researchers. Some studies have shown that children who suffer from emotional abuse have the worst outcome of all abuse and are better predictors of later problems (Briere & Runtz, 1990; Kaplan, Pelcovitz, & Labruna, 1999; Simeon, Guralnik, Schmeidler, Sirof & Knutelska, 2001). Rejection from parents has been found to be predictors of internalizing and externalizing problems (Nishikwa, Sundbom, & Hagglof, 2010); terrorizing predicts anxiety and somatic concerns, ignoring predicts scores of depression and features of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), and degradation predicts BPD features only (Allen, 2008).

There is strong and consistent evidence across diverse theories and studies also that emotional maltreatment of children by parents, teachers, and caregivers contributed to negative self concept of the abused persons. Family members, such as parents, siblings, spouse, grandparents, are significant others who have powerful effects on self concept (Mooney, Knox, Schacht, 2008). Kuppuswamy as cited in Kaur, Rana, & Kaur, (2009) argues that self concept is an unfinished product at birth but its development depends on the family wherein an individual is brought up. Briere & Runtz (1990) observe that emotional abuse seems to be closely associated with low self evaluation probably because children tend to internalize parental statements as part of the criteria for self perception.

The relationships between parents, emotional abuse, and self concept was made more poignant when the Government of Alberta (2007) refers to emotional abuse as attack on the self concept and self worth of the child by parents. It was further stated that emotional abuse is the result of exposure to family violence in the home; exposure to chronic alcohol or drug use in the home; rejection; the child being ignored or isolated; threats, humiliation, unrealistic expectations, or inappropriate accusations/criticism; corruption or negative exposure to someone with a mental or emotional condition (including suicidal or homicidal ideas) in the home.

Self concept refers to self evaluation or self perception which represents the sum of an individual's beliefs in his/her own attributes (Hadley, Hair, & Moore, 2008). Several studies have reported that a history of emotional abuse at childhood is strongly predictive of mental health problems –low mood, hopelessness, low self esteem (Kauffman, 1991; Toth, Manly, & Cicchetti, 1992; Kelly, Thornberry, & Smith, 1997; Sackette & Saunders, 1999; Nesbit & Philpott, 2002); and depression (Rich, Gingerich, Roshen ,1997). Parental acceptance-rejection theory has also predicted that emotional abuse by parents not only have consistent effects on the personality development of abused children but also on the personality functioning of adults who were rejected as children (Rohner, Khaleque, Cournoyer, 2007). Shumba (2002) cautions that pupils should not be psychologically maltreated because it humiliates and dehumanizes them, destroys their self concept or image, makes them to hate school, de-motivates them from learning, deforms their character, makes them shy, makes them confused, disgraces them, and frightens them.

Despite the fact that there is consistent theoretical and empirical supports for causal association between emotional abuse and self concept, there is lack of empirical information on specific joint and separate contributions of seven dimensions of emotional abuse to self concept most especially in Nigeria. Most studies that had established cause-effect relationship between emotional abuse and self-concept failed to take into cognizance the existence of diverse forms of emotional maltreatment. Emotional abuse was thus treated as a single entity which did not give room for

comprehensive knowledge of the contributions and relationships of diverse dimensions of emotional maltreatment to self concept. Consequently, it has been difficult to ascertain the contributions and relationships of different forms of emotional abuse to self concept. This paper, therefore investigates the combined and separate impacts of seven dimensions of emotional maltreatment on self-concept of school adolescents and relationship between the dimensions and self concept. As far as this researcher is aware no prior research has addressed the predictive ability of different forms of emotional abuse on adolescents' self concept especially in Nigeria.

Research Hypotheses

- (1) The seven dimensions of emotional maltreatment will not make significant combined contributions to adolescents' self concept.
- (2) Each of the seven dimensions of emotional maltreatment will not make relative contributions to adolescents' self concept.
- (3) There is no significant relationship among the seven dimensions of emotional maltreatment and adolescents' self concept.

Methodology

Descriptive survey design was employed for the study. The sample consisted of 480 (215 males and 265 females) students purposively selected from 15 private senior secondary schools in Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria. Questionnaire on Seven Dimensions Emotional Maltreatment at Home (QSDMH) developed by Gesinde (2010) and a self concept subscale from Adolescent Personal Data Inventory (APDI) by Akinboye (1977) were used to generate data. QSDMH has two main divisions-the demographic information and section for the seven dimensions of maltreatment (degrading, exploiting, corrupting, isolating, ignoring, rejecting, and terrorizing). Each of the dimensions consists of seven items on four point Likert rating scale of Very often (4); Often (3); Sometimes (2); Never (1). The split-half reliability paradigm of QSDMH was established to be 0.84. The APDI (self concept subscale) has 30 items with 5 Likert type scale format ranging from "least like me 1 2 3 4 5 most like me" The APDI has internal consistency reliability of 0.87 and test-retest reliability of 0.93 was also reported. The revalidation of test-retest reliability of APDI yielded 0.81. The researcher with the assistance of ten research assistants administered and collected the copies of the questionnaire from the participants after due permission of the principals of the schools. Data generated from the instrument were analyzed using multiple regression and correlation coefficient.

Result

Table I: Summary of regression analysis between the predictor variables (emotional maltreatment and outcome measure (self concept))

$R=.529$, $R^2=.280$, R^2 -adjusted=.270, $SE=7.94321$

Source	Sum of Square	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig
Regression	11602.353	7	1657.479	26.270	0.000
Residual	29780.639	472	63.095		
Total	41382.992	479			

The display from Table I reveals that the seven independent variables when put together could only account for 28% of the total variance in self concept ($R^2 = .280$).

Table II: Relative contribution of the seven dimensions of emotional maltreatment to the prediction of self concept

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient		
	B	Std Error	Beta	t	Sig.
Degrading	-.542	.174	-.173	-3.113	.002
Exploring	-.554	.249	-.119	-2.227	.026
Corrupting	-.203	.423	-.021	.480	.632
Isolating	-.625	.170	-.173	-3.670	.000
Ignoring	-.276	.257	-.062	-1.074	.283
Rejecting	-.229	.325	-.040	-.704	.482
Terrorizing	-.610	.245	-.129	-2.486	.013
Constant	116.631	2.971		39.251	.00

*0.05 level of significance

Table II reveals that isolating is the best predictor of adolescent self concept ($\beta = -.173$; $t = -3.670$). Similarly, only degrading, exploiting, isolating, and terrorizing out of the seven dimensions of emotional maltreatment were found to be significant. Corrupting, ignoring, and rejecting could not enter the regression equation at alpha level of .05.

Table III: Inter-Correlation Matrix of Emotional Maltreatment and Self Concept

Degrading	1 .550(**)	.240(**)	.433(**)	.623(**)	.556(**)	.555(**)	-.441(**)
Exploring	1	.364(**)	.449(**)	.545(**)	.476(**)	.511(**)	-.403(**)
Corrupting	1	.180(**)	.198(**)	.377(**)	.254(**)	-.155(**)	
Isolating	1	.444(**)	.476(**)	.362(**)	-.391(**)		
Ignoring	1	.642(**)	.549(**)	-.404(**)			
Rejecting	1	.549(**)	-.377(**)				
Terrorizing	1	-.400(**)					
Self-Concept	1						
N	480	480	480	480	480	480	480

Table III reveals the negative significant relationship between the predictors and independent variables ranges from $r = -.155$ to $.441$, $p < .05$.

Discussion

The results of this study reveal that the seven forms of emotional maltreatment could not explain 72% of variance in the criterion variable. Consequently, there are other variables apart from those used for this study that are responsible for the variance. The fact that isolating ($\beta = -.173$) contributed more to the prediction than other forms did not come as a surprise because studies have shown that it is the most common form of emotional maltreatment at home in Nigeria (Gesinde, 2010). The negative relationship that existed between the predictor variables and self concept led credence to studies such as Kinard, 1980; Kaplan, Pelcovitz, & Labruna, 1999; Romeo, 2000; Shumba 2002 that have identified the negative effect of emotional abuse on self concept. However, the findings of this study have further demonstrated that the degree at which the negative relationship existed varies from one form of emotional maltreatment to the other. It is evident from this study that as emotional abuse rises so also will individual self concept experience a downward trend.

In conclusion, it is clear that the seven dimensions of emotional abuse identified in this study have potential to predict adolescents' self concept. As such, considerable attention should be given to all the dimensions. Jolly Aluede, & Ojugo, (2009) asserted that emotional maltreatment is a problem that is affecting all races, religion socio-economic groups, sex, and age in Nigeria. Prior studies have shown that Nigerian adolescents have positive self concept (Olowu, 1985; Oyefeso & Zacheaus, 1990). The presence of emotional maltreatment therefore portends danger to their positive self concept. Psychologists and counsellors should therefore commence the development of diagnostic tools and therapeutic strategies of emotional maltreatment at home with a view to protect the self concept of the adolescents. Further research is also needed to better understand the causal direction of the association between emotional maltreatment and self concept of adolescents out of school.

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